

Keeping flame burning

VERA WALD is a woman who impresses because of her quiet manners, soft voice — and dignity.

You sense that she always has her feelings in control. She nonetheless is warm and enthusiastic — especially so when the conversation swings to her late husband, Herman.

You gather that both he and she thought much of life in philosophical terms. She often carries a notebook with her, in which random thoughts are jotted down — together with ideas that Herman Wald had — such as, "Artists are the only kings who are crowned dead," and, "Anticipation may fill one's life — fulfilment empties it."

Flash

Indeed, where Vera might haphazardly carry a notebook for occasional reflections, she says that Herman was never without one. "He was eternally drawing — setting down ideas for his sculpture pieces.

"Once, strange to say, he had no notebook handy. Actually, he'd been out shopping and, in the bus going home, he had a sudden flash of inspiration.

"He startled the other passengers by suddenly feverishly unwrapping, and digging at, a hunk of cheese he'd bought.

"And, when he got home, he'd roughly carved a fist holding the 'shofar' — ram's horn. This was eventually to form the theme of one of his most famous compositions, which stands at the Westpark Jewish Cemetery — a monument to the six million Jews who perished in Hitler's time.

Talent

"This particular commission was in the nature of a competition, organised by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. So the idea on the bus might never have been brought to fruition without that cheese."

Herman Wald, born in Hungary in 1906, was descended from seven generations of rabbis. His talent for carving was so intense, even

RICHARD CHEALES on art



Vera Wald — a sketch by Richard Cheales.

as a youth, that it aroused conflict with his father, Jacob Wald, who felt strongly about the Biblical injunction against graven images.

So young Wald worked secretly in an area of his mother's storeroom. His pride, when he finished a bust of Dr Theodor Herzl (founder of the modern Zionist Movement) was so immense, that with trepidation he showed his father the carving.

The rabbi realised the depth and fervour of his son's desire to be a sculptor, and allowed him to take up art studies in Budapest.

Graduating (with distinction) from the Budapest Academy, young Wald worked under Anton Hancock for three years, in Vienna; then he decided to work (under Totilla) in Berlin. Hitler's dark star was in ascendent, and Wald left Germany, ultimately arriving in London, in

1933, where his sculpture won him praise and encouragement from Epstein.

His brother, Dr Marcus Wald, had settled in South Africa, and suggested that Herman emigrate. He did so, settling in Johannesburg, where his studio (where he taught) became a centre of local art life.

He held one-man shows of his work in various centres: and, in 1942, he married Vera Rosenbaum.

Wald served in the Engineers Camouflage Unit, in World War 11, and a period of great creative activity (exhibitions opened by Barnett Potter, Ben Ami and Councillor Alec Gorshell, took place in Johannesburg) followed his discharge from the army, culminating in a New York exhibition in 1952.

Harry Oppenheimer commissioned him to design and erect two fountains (in memory of the late Sir Ernest Oppenheimer), and probably his best-known sculpture piece was evolved — the design of leaping buck (adjoining the Old Post Office), known as the Oppenheimer Fountain.

The original study for this highly ambitious undertaking (that followed many trips to the game reserve, where Wald was fascinated by impala, calling them the graceful ballet dancers of the veld), was presented to Harry Oppenheimer.

Wald died on July 4, three days before his birthday, in 1970, and is buried beside the monument he carved with such reverence, at Westpark Jewish Cemetery.

Vera Wald's passionate regard for both the man and his art, is like a steady flame. She keeps his studio (at 52, 6th Avenue, Parktown North) open over weekends so that admirers of the work of one of our leading sculptors can be seen in the area where so many of the pieces were planned and evolved.

What's on show

AKIS Standard Bank Centre Gallery: PHILIP BAWCOMBE watercolours.

Alphonso Lee Studio, Tower Building: GORDON TUCKER ink drawings.

Art Gallery: Rembrandt van Rijn Foundation's "The Animal in Art" exhibition.

Coleman Gallery, Gardens: Group show of graphics.

Crake Gallery, Norwood: CARL JEPPE's drawings. Show extended.

Gallery 21: Tapestries by A C RECK.

Goodman Gallery, Hyde Park: BILL HART has reliefs: LEGAE mixed media paintings.

Lister Gallery: Oils by ALEXANDER ROSE INNES

Market Theatre Gallery: TAVISH COOKE exhibits.

Nedbank Gallery, Killarney: MARGARET RUNDLE exhibition.

Read Gallery: MADELEINE LUKA PAINTINGS.

SA Museum of Military History: Contemporary SA war art.

Total Gallery: Boyazoglu French Africana collection.

305 Queensgate, Parktown (phone 642 8138): RAE HOCHSTEIN's expressionistic drawings.

304 Phineas Court: Horse-and-sky studies by RICHARD CHEALES.

8th Floor, State House, Quartz Street: International graphics.

Showroom 32, Mutual Square, Rosebank: CEES RIETBROEK paintings.